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*John
Fries
Blair*



by Margaret Blair McCuiston

NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY IMPRINTS
NUMBER 8

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of which this is number*

499

NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY IMPRINTS

H. G. Jones, Editor

No. 1. *An Evening at Monticello: An Essay in Reflection* (1978)
by Edwin M. Gill

No. 2. *The Paul Green I Know* (1978)
by Elizabeth Lay Green

No. 3. *The Albert Coates I Know* (1979)
by Gladys Hall Coates

No. 4. *The Sam Ervin I Know* (1980)
by Jean Conyers Ervin

No. 5. *Sam Ragan* (1981)
by Neil Morgan

No. 6. *Thomas Wolfe of North Carolina* (1982)
edited by H. G. Jones

No. 7. *Gertrude Sprague Carraway* (1982)
by Sam Ragan

No. 8. *John Fries Blair* (1983)
by Margaret Blair McCuiston

*John
Fries
Blair*



Margaret Blair McCuiston
by *Margaret Blair McCuiston*

*Together with Proceedings of a Banquet on the Occasion of the Presentation
of the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1983*

Chapel Hill
NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY, INC.
1983

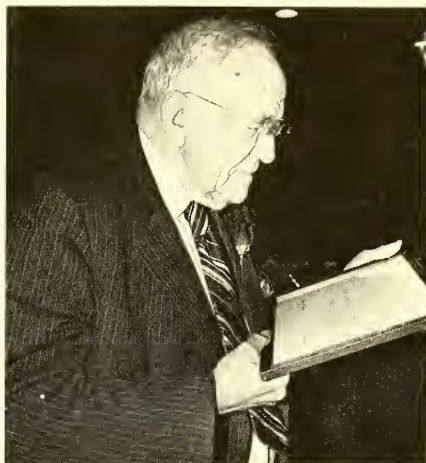
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AN EVENING WITH JOHN FRIES BLAIR

On the evening of May 20, 1983, friends and relatives attended a reception and banquet in the Carolina Inn, Chapel Hill, honoring John Fries Blair on the occasion of his acceptance of the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1983. The master of ceremonies was Dr. H. G. Jones, curator of the North Carolina Collection and secretary-treasurer of the North Caroliniana Society; and the award was presented by Archie K. Davis, president of the Society. Brief tributes were given by Sam Ragan and Albert Coates, followed by the secret main speaker, Margaret Blair McCuiston, sister of the honoree. Their remarks, along with the recipient's response, are published in this the eighth number in the North Caroliniana Society Imprints series. Included also, with special permission, is Roy Thompson's story on Blair that appeared in the Winston-Salem Journal of May 22, 1983.





IN RECOGNITION OF SERVICE: John Fries Blair at top holds the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1983, and at bottom he is shown with his sister, Margaret Blair McCuiston, the surprise speaker, and Archie K. Davis, president of the North Caroliniana Society. (Top photo by Mae Woods Bell; others unless noted by Jerry W. Cotten.)



Four of the speakers who honored John Fries Blair, from left to right, top to bottom: Dr. H.G. Jones, secretary of the Society and master of ceremonies; Sam Ragan, who spoke of Blair's contributions to literature; Albert Coates, who described his public service; and Margaret Blair McCuiston, who traced her brother's career.



The banquet gave Blair an opportunity to renew old friendships. At top, he chats with George H. Esser, former colleague at the Institute of Government; and at bottom he shares a hearty laugh with John W. Harden, author, businessman, and longtime friend.



At top Albert Coates (left), founder of the Institute of Government, talks with the Reverend William W. Finlater, civil libertarian; and at bottom two editors — Sam Ragan of the Pilot (Southern Pines) and Roy Parker, Jr., of the Fayetteville Times — carry on an intense discussion.



In top photograph, former Governor and Mrs. Dan K. Moore converse with Archie K. Davis, president of the North Caroliniana Society; and at bottom H.B. (Mack) Webb (center) shares a drink with Frances Wellman and her husband, Manly Wade Wellman, the state's most prolific book writer.



DR. H. G. JONES, *Master of Ceremonies*:

Nearly forty years ago, he stole much of the applause on the stage of the Carolina Playmakers as Conover in *State of the Union*, Canon Matt Lavelle in *The White Steed*, and Don Carawan in *Calliope*. (Don Carawan—drop the “Cara” and we get Don Juan!) He cut a lithe figure on the dance floor and was the most sought-after partner on the Chapel Hill Country Club’s bachelor list.

Like Thomas Wolfe, he learned that his forté was not playwriting after the Playmakers performed his *Cornbread—a Domestic Farce*, featuring such characters as Mullican, Maloney, Farmer Brown, and Lem. His acting, however, continued a favorite pastime until 1961 when he was poisoned in *Arsenic and Old Lace*.

His integrity was above reproach—so solid, in fact, that his buddy Andy Griffith entrusted his girl friends to our honoree, who, it is alleged, never violated the trust. If so, none of the young women complained.

Since entering the publishing business in 1954, he has produced more than 120 books, nearly a hundred of them still in print. His books have included major contributions to our state and region, and several of them have won literary awards. If we take a bit of liberty with a few of the titles, we find a remarkable range of subjects: whispering pines and carnivorous plants; sand roots and nematodes; winter birds and spotted hawks; white stallions and remembered mules; historic restaurants and company shops; tapestry makers and casketmakers; weekly affairs, innocent bigamy, and spiritual divorces; pirates, Tar Heel writers, and gloomy deans; inky pusses, wild queens, swamp girls, painted ladies, and haloless papas; lord hams, po’ folks, hungry guts, and wet butts.

Tonight we shall hear about more sides of John Fries Blair than some of you thought he had. Don’t be surprised if that Moravian star associated with him occasionally twinkles or even blinks as some of his hidden characteristics are exposed.

But first we must expose those sitting at the head table. When you look at this group, you may think that we should have done everything possible to elevate them. But out of respect for the egalitarian spirit of

John Fries Blair, we have placed everybody on the same level. As I recognize each person, would you rise and remain standing and would the audience withhold applause until all have been recognized.

From my far left:

1. Mr. North Carolina History and the vice-president (former president) of the North Caroliniana Society, William S. Powell;

2. The associate editor of *The Pilot*, of Southern Pines, Marjorie Ragan;

3. The recipient of the second North Caroliniana Society Award, Albert Coates;

4. A gracious lady known to all of Winston-Salem and much of North Carolina, Mary Louise Davis.

From my far right:

5. The recipient of the fourth North Caroliniana Society Award, Sam Ragan;

6. The bylineless coauthor of a lot of Bill Powell's works, Virginia Powell;

7. The president of the North Caroliniana Society who accepted the position only on condition that he never be subjected to the indignity of receiving a North Caroliniana Society Award, Archie K. Davis;

8. The cofounder of the Institute of Government and the only restraint ever recognized by Albert, Gladys Coates;

9. And now will you join me in welcoming our guest of honor, John Fries Blair.

Let us also welcome members of John's immediate family (please withhold your applause until all are standing): His sister, Margaret Blair McCuiston; his nephew, Robert A. McCuiston, Jr., and niece, Erdmuth Venable and her husband Scott; and his grandnieces and grandnephews, Patricia McCuiston, Robert A. McCuiston III and wife Ellen, Dorothea Venable, William Blair Venable, Margaret Couch, and Paul Couch.

A little later we will let you take a look at the people who work every day with John, but first, visit with your neighbors and enjoy your dinner.

[Dinner followed.]



When we wrote John asking permission to treat him as we have Paul Green, Albert Coates, Sam Ervin, Sam Ragan, and Gertrude Carraway (the previous recipients of the North Caroliniana Society awards), there was silence. More than a month passed. We mailed him a copy of the original letter and observed that we needed to fix a date convenient for him, us, and the Inn.

This time he responded promptly, explaining that though he always sorted his mail into two piles, one marked "urgent" and the other "not so urgent," he never got around to opening the "not so urgent" materials and that, unfortunately, it had been several weeks since he looked at the "urgent" pile, in which our original letter had apparently rested unopened.

He did, however, know the perfect date for the presentation banquet. Only there was a problem. April Fools' Day fell on Good Friday this year, and as a strict Moravian he was already committed in Salem on that date.

You may blame us, therefore, for selecting May 20, the alleged anniversary of North Carolina's most famous myth, for the Carolina Inn—built and given to the university by John Sprunt Hill for the benefit of the North Carolina Collection—was already booked for September 28, when John will reach the milestone of fourscore years.

We had another scare last week. The North Caroliniana Society is noted for its stinginess, and it makes honorees pay their own way. Well, we had received no check from John Blair. Were we to have a celebration without the guest of honor? Archie told me not to worry—that John was practicing good Moravian economy by leaving his \$12.50 in Wachovia's daily interest account until the last possible moment. Actually, that was not the problem. John called and said he'd like to come but had not received an invitation. Sure enough, we found an inexplicable "x" beside his name on the membership list. We still have not figured out why we failed to invite him to his own party.

John Fries Blair is the first recipient of the North Caroliniana Society Award to have received all three of his academic degrees out of state. The difficulty of overcoming this dreadful handicap indicates the weight given by the Society to his public service once he returned to his roots.

I have alluded, and others will allude, to John's career as a publisher who must read, or have others read, a mass of manuscripts in order to select those few worthy of publication. Early in his career he told a reporter that he had a nightmare: he was walled in by a stream of unsolicited manu-

scripts. "That has already happened," says a member of his staff, for he receives about 500 manuscripts each year. As visual evidence of his nightmare, his staff has furnished us with a large picture showing his desk inundated with stacks and stacks of typescripts. That picture, along with some other memorabilia and many of his books, is exhibited in the hall of Wilson Library in a display mounted by Alice Cotten and Linda Lloyd. Unfortunately it is too late tonight to see the exhibit, but it will be up for several weeks, and we invite you to come by to see it.

At this time we should acknowledge John's loyal staff. Will the following associates rise and remain standing so we can welcome you as a group: Ed Friedenberg and wife, Brenda Johnson and husband, Virginia Ingram, Marcia Harmon, Jean Pruett, and Margaret Couch. There are undoubtedly other former members of his staff here, and of course each of you is his associate in some capacity. I will recognize but five more persons: directly in front of us here are Governor and Mrs. Dan K. Moore, and the Librarian of the University of North Carolina, Dr. James Govan and Mrs. Govan, and somewhere in the audience is Dr. Gertrude Carraway, the recipient of our award in 1982.

Many of your friends, John, sent their regrets for being unable to spend this evening with you. Senator Ervin, who said he reckoned he'd better show up at a dinner given in his honor tonight by the Morganton Shriners, sent a contribution in your honor. Former Governor Robert W. Scott is giving the commencement address at Sandhills Community College, and Chancellor Christopher C. Fordham III has a conflicting engagement. Dorothy Owen, who is in England, wrote, "Mr. Blair is a great person. . . ." Jonathan Williams, who left today for England, wrote, "Mr. Blair has done a lot of valuable work in North Carolina over a number of years. I admire his quality and his persistence. May he thrive." And David Morgan, who leaves tomorrow for England, wrote, "Please tell him that I send congratulations and best wishes."

More messages later.



Sam Ragan is more than the poet laureate of North Carolina. For decades he has led a distinguished career as a newspaperman, author, television personality, and public servant. He and Walter Spearman have done

more to stimulate and promote the production of literature in North Carolina than any two people alive. As a participant in and observer of the literary scene for half a century and as the nation's first head of a state cultural department, Sam can speak for the entire literary community. I am pleased to present the recipient of the fourth North Caroliniana Society Award, the Bard of Berea, Sam Ragan.



SAM RAGAN:

I always enjoy these North Caroliniana Society dinners, and it's especially enjoyable tonight as we honor an old friend, John Fries Blair.

I have never seen John Blair on the stage, although he's a consummate actor and is dedicated to the theater.

I have never been in his classroom, although a career as a teacher was one of many he has followed.

I have never seen him in the courtroom, or watched him as a counselor to government—and yes, that's another facet of this remarkable man who has done so many things.

But I do know him as John F. Blair, Publisher—and it is as a publisher that he has had such a tremendous impact on North Carolina life and letters.

He was the publisher of my first book of poetry. And having John Blair as your editor and publisher is truly an experience. When he accepted my manuscript for publication he was as excited about it as I was. But he's a meticulous editor, as I soon discovered that he had read every poem and searched every comma and period. One poem he questioned—and I admit it was a bit esoteric—but my wife Marjorie, who sat in on our informal editorial conference, took up for it, and he graciously yielded.

But there was another in which he questioned my reporting. I had written about a woods which had been swept by a fire storm, and I said the limbs of trees hung down like the broken wing of a bird. John said he thought a broken wing of a bird was hiked up, but I insisted it hung down, and he finally accepted my version.

I never knew a publisher who was more kind, helpful, and reassuring; and I have steered many other writers in his direction. They have all received the same kind of treatment.

The benign and smiling face of John Fries Blair has been a fixture at gatherings of the North Carolina Writers Conference for nearly 30 years.

His publishing house has earned a splendid reputation for the quality of its books, and the gentle way of its publisher.

I firmly believe that more and more books will be published in the future by regional publishing houses such as John F. Blair of Winston-Salem. In a way, he has been a pioneer in the field, and North Carolina literature is greatly in his debt.

Some years ago at the annual meeting of the North Carolina Writers Conference I was serving as chairman of the nominating committee for new officers. I approached John Blair and asked if he would serve as chairman for the next year.

He demurred and protested, "With all these writers here, I don't know. I'm just a publisher."

"Being 'just a publisher' is pretty important," I said. "A lot of these writers wouldn't be here except for you."

He yielded and was elected chairman by acclamation.

I am honored to join in this salute to John F. Blair, Publisher.



DR. JONES:

Someone has called Albert Coates a living myth. That's not right. He's a living reality. Few figures have cast such a long shadow on this university community since the arrival of a bright young man from Johnston County more than two-thirds of a century ago. His imprint will be visible on the campus and throughout the state for generations to come; the Institute of Government stands as just one of his monuments. But Albert Coates is a legend in his own time, particularly on a platform. Over the years we have failed in every attempt to reign him in and to hold him to a time limit, but tonight we try a new invention. It is called a "Terraillon,"

a “Minuteur avec cordon pour porter autour du cou.” It is a timer to be placed around the speaker’s neck, and when his time is up, an alarm goes off, an electric shock knocks him breathless, and the device climbs up the ropes and strangles him. But we have never tested the “Albertan Terrailon,” and because we have no insurance, we’ll simply put it beside the podium. Next time, though, Albert, we’re going to bell the cat! Ladies and gentleman, the legendary but very real Albert Coates.



ALBERT COATES:

For thirty years the highest compliment I could pay to any man on earth was to invite him to join the staff of the Institute of Government. I paid that compliment to John Fries Blair in the early 1940s.

When he came on the Institute staff, I started him on a job that was to absorb most of the three or four years he worked with the Institute of Government. Here is the background of that job:

The coming of the automobile to North Carolina in the early 1900s brought the beginning of laws regulating traffic in particular trouble spots. With the rapidly increasing number of automobiles coming on the streets and highways during the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, these laws expanded into a statewide traffic code regulating every step in the driving of an automobile on the public highways. Cities and towns followed the state pattern each with its own separate motor vehicle code. The court decisions construing this multiplicity of state laws and city ordinances were in a hundred volumes of supreme court reports. Looking for the separate laws bearing on the same situations was like looking for needles in haystacks.

I started John Fries Blair to work in this thicket of laws scattered in different places to the point of practical inaccessibility. He tracked out the separate laws bearing on the same points and brought them together for the convenient use of lawyers at the bar, judges on the bench, legislators in the General Assembly. He wrote them into guidebooks for the convenient use of students and teachers in schools for law-enforcing officers all over

North Carolina. His work was the foundation of Institute of Government training schools for State Highway Patrolmen for thirty years—from the middle 1940s to the middle 1970s. It has provided the model and the starting point for others who have followed in his footsteps.

I found out later that this particular job was extremely unpleasant and distasteful to him—that his gorge would rise and flesh crawl off his bones at the thought of it—but I did not find it out from John Fries Blair. He went to work on the job without question and without protest. And that brings me to the one and only point I want to make on John Fries Blair tonight. It is rooted in a personal experience in my college days.

At the beginning of the fall term of my junior year in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1916, Dr. A.H. Patterson called me into his office and told me I had flunked his course in physics. He said that he had been surprised that I would flunk a course, and had looked up my grades in other courses in the registrar's office. He had found that I had good grades in English, history, philosophy, and economics, a passing grade in French, and a failing grade in physics. In the light of my record in other courses, he wondered whether the fault in the physics failure lay with him or with me.

I told him that the failure was my fault and not his; that I had put most of my time on courses which I thought would do me some good in the study of law and government; that I had allowed what I thought was enough time to pass the courses in physics and French, which I was taking for the sole purpose of a college degree; and that I had won the gamble in French and lost the gamble in physics. He told me I was wrong—that every student, every year, ought to take one distasteful course, or a course under one distasteful teacher, and do his level best to make his highest grade on that course—for the sake of the discipline involved. That was my first direct acquaintance with the word *discipline*.

That word was what Edward Kidder Graham was talking about when he said in a chapel talk in my sophomore year: "No student is truly trained unless he has learned to do pleasantly, and promptly, and with clean-cut accuracy every task he has obligated himself to do. A man may decline to undertake a job, but to undertake it and shirk it is a crime in the world of efficiency." John Fries Blair did not commit that crime. He not only did the job assigned to him, he did it with a distinction which I remember to this day—with gratitude and admiration.

A paragraph from the Joseph Woods Krutch biography of Samuel Johnson years ago has this to say about him: "Here was a man who could

be commissioned to do a job in the full confidence that, though he would approach the job as a job, he would also do a better job than anyone else working for love or fame at his chosen avocation would have done it.”

What Joseph Woods Krutch said about Samuel Johnson I am saying about John Fries Blair. I wanted so much to say it—out loud and in public—that I asked to be put on the program to say it here tonight in the presence of his homefolks, friends, and admirers who have come to Chapel Hill to do him honor. I am saying it about a man who is as fine a combination of the gentleman and the scholar as I have ever been privileged to know. I am saying it about a man who has the sort of mind that automatically throws out trash. I am saying it about a man whom I had rather have edit and publish a book of mine than any other man I know. I am saying it about a man whose good taste and good judgment and common decency and goodwill have made him a neighbor worth having and a colleague worth working with. In short, he is the man we know as John Fries Blair.



DR. JONES:

Before presenting our president who will introduce our secret speaker, I should say just a word about the North Caroliniana Society. You will observe that we are not a publicity-seeking organization. Our purpose is to encourage and promote knowledge and appreciation of the cultural heritage of the state whose motto is *to be rather than to seem*. Members are elected not on the basis of what they can give in the future but rather what they have done in the past. We seek to recognize those who, like John Fries Blair, devote their careers to causes that exemplify the collective character of our state. John, you are the first, and may be the last, recipient of our award who earned all three of his degrees outside the state. Normally we are not so broadminded. Later this year we will publish the entire proceedings of this evening, and a copy will be sent to each on tonight's ticket-list. At that time a suggestion will be made as to how we all may again show our appreciation for John's contributions to our state.

As the secretary-treasurer, I have the pleasure of calling the attention of members to the fact that there are no "In memoriams" on our printed program, and I thank you all for your consideration in making it through the year. I urge you to remain in good health, for we don't want to lose anyone. Besides, it's a bit of a bother to have to print those little boxes.



Archie Davis has been accumulating records ever since he entered the University of North Carolina. Upon his graduation in the depths of the depression, a job in a bank looked better than an advanced degree in his first interest, history. So he became a banker. A real banker. In 1956 he reached the chairmanship of the board of Wachovia Bank and Trust Company and became a student of the trombone. There are musicians who say that he was a great banker, but we have not heard a banker say that he was a great musician. But he had fun. He served in the state senate, helped establish the Research Triangle Park, then more recently lured to the Triangle—and is now helping to insure its future—the National Humanities Center, whose building appropriately was named for him over his objections. He is the only person, insofar as I can determine, who has served as president of both the American Bankers Association and the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. He has carried his love for North Carolina into the boardrooms of major national corporations, and he has brilliantly upheld the honor of the South in front of audiences, respectable and otherwise, throughout the country.

Forty-two years after receiving his bachelor's degree from this university, he returned to the classroom and earned a master's degree in history. Then he did something believed never previously accomplished: He researched and wrote a dissertation, defended it before a faculty inquisition, and received a special certificate recognizing the high quality of his work. The title: "The Boy Colonel: The Life and Times of Henry King (Harry) Burgwyn, Jr." The size: over 1,300 pages in three volumes. The weight: Sixteen pounds. We had intended to bring our set of the volumes for display here tonight, but we were advised that the state's disability insurance did not cover strains from carrying heavy loads of library books.

Ladies and gentlemen, North Carolina's ambassador of cultural goodwill, the president of the North Caroliniana Society—and he was re-elected this afternoon—Archie K. Davis.



ARCHIE K. DAVIS:

Ladies and gentlemen, you will note that the identity of our next speaker has been carefully concealed. While the name is not listed on the program, I can assure you that a surprise witness is now waiting in the wings. Would that I were free to wax eloquent in my introduction of a very remarkable person, but I am limited to a very few, brief, unrevealing facts:

This person was trained at a famous riding school in Boston and has been an equestrian of note.

This person was introduced to John Fries Blair many years ago through the good offices of mutual friends.

This person has long been impressed by our honored guest's affinity for surf fishing and square dancing, which reveals nothing and suggests nothing—to say the least, the two sports are mutually exclusive.

Up to this point I have carefully endeavored not to identify the gender of our next speaker, but I must now confess that a lady is involved and, may I add, a very warm and affectionate relationship has developed over the years between this lady and John Fries Blair.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am profoundly privileged to present to you a most remarkable and talented lady, Margaret Blair McCuiston, a warm admirer, confidant and loyal supporter of her brother John Fries.





Recollections of My Brother

By Margaret Blair McCuiston

September 28, 1903, was a bright sunshiny day. My sister Marian and I were playing near the grape arbor in my grandmother's yard, next door to our house, when Grandma came down the hill to join us. I knew that something important must have happened, because Grandma seldom walked in the yard. She looked very happy, and she told us that we had a baby brother. Later in the day, we were taken up the hill to our house to see the new arrival.

I was disappointed. I thought babies sat up in carriages and shook rattles, and this one was just lying there, with his eyes closed, not interesting at all. I hasten to add that my disappointment did not last long. Playing with him became one of my favorite occupations, and I took a personal pride in each of his accomplishments and achievements. I still do.

I began keeping a diary in 1908, and there have been many entries connected with John Fries. One of them was his first scheduled appearance in public, a recitation at the Sunday School Christmas concert in 1910.

An earlier occasion on which his voice was heard, was not chronicled nor scheduled. It was at his first Lovefeast. Any one of you who have attended a Moravian Lovefeast know that the members of the congregation wait until everyone has been served before they eat the buns. Nobody had told me that when I first went, and I took a large bite out of my bun the moment I received it. That embarrassed my mother greatly. She wanted to make sure that John Fries did not commit the same social error, so she told him not to eat until he saw the bishop start to do so. Her obedient son waited until the proper moment, and then announced joyfully, at the top of his voice, "The bishop has begun!"



Marian and John Fries and I were congenial, and the three of us spent many hours playing together. As Marian and I were older, I think we usually planned the games. Mostly, they were what we called "make-ups" in which we had all kinds of imaginary adventures. Sometimes we would invent our roles and sometimes we would act as characters in stories we had read. John Fries usually enjoyed make-ups but was occasionally frightened. He told me once that he had been afraid, for weeks, to go into one corner of the attic, because he thought that Bluebeard's wives were hidden there.

John Fries has the distinction of having entered Salem Academy in the first grade. Very few children in Salem went to public school. Scattered all over the central part of town were small private schools, usually taking the children through the fifth grade, after which they entered Salem Academy or the Salem Boy's School. In 1910, several of the schools had closed, so Salem Academy stepped into the breach and organized a new Preparatory School, open to both girls and boys.

John Fries entered the Preparatory School and was there for three years. All the school students in Salem went to the Home Moravian Church at 11 o'clock every Wednesday morning. Bishop Edward Rondthaler had assigned a hymn stanza to be memorized that week, and each separate school had to recite it. I don't know how many other hymns my brother knows by heart, but he certainly knows every word of the stanzas he recited in young peoples meeting.

In 1913, the towns of Winston and Salem became one municipality and combined their school systems. This was a great change for the children of Salem. Gone were all the small private schools, including the Preparatory School, and gone was the Tinsley Military Institute, which had succeeded the Salem Boys' School. John Fries entered the Salem grade school, held in the building which had been used by Tinsley. He has frequently said that attendance at the Wednesday young peoples meetings was a privilege he wished he might have had longer.

At the age of twelve, John Fries and about a dozen of his friends became Boy Scout Troop #9. This was a major interest in their lives until they went to college. Our father was scoutmaster, and spent a great deal of time with the boys. Besides their regular meetings, they took nature walks on Sunday afternoons and several times went to the coast on fishing trips, traveling overnight on the train. Their bonds of friendship never weakened. Reunions of Troop 9 have never ceased to be held. The numbers present have grown smaller year by year, but the three surviving

members who live in Winston-Salem still celebrate their birthdays together every year.



If you think that my brother entered the publishing business only thirty years ago, you are mistaken. He began his publishing career at the age of eleven, producing a newspaper called the *Enterprise*. He wrote the articles, printed the paper on his own printing press, and sold the copies for five cents apiece. The size of the paper, if I remember correctly, was about four by six inches.

When John Fries entered high school, the location was very convenient. He walked up Cherry Street for four blocks. His high school career was satisfying. He entered the declamation contest all four years and won the last three. He was president of the senior class, and won the Mary C. Wiley prize for the highest grades in English.

Then he followed our father's footsteps and went to Haverford, a Quaker College near Philadelphia. There he was a Corporation Scholar (a designation given to the four men in each class with the highest academic averages). He majored in philosophy and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa; but took time to be a member of the varsity cricket team and to take part in several plays. He was class orator at commencement.

In the autumn of 1924, John Fries entered Harvard Law School. His course there was interrupted by a summer spent in Chapel Hill, where he prepared for and passed the North Carolina Bar examination, and also by a bout with arthritis, which caused him to miss a whole semester. He graduated from law school in 1928, and then opened an office in Winston-Salem and practiced law for twelve years.

During that time he served as secretary of the Forsyth County Bar Association, director of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, president of the Little Theatre of Winston-Salem, and teacher of a Sunday-School class at the Home Moravian Church. In spite of these responsibilities, he always found time for frequent evenings of square dancing, especially with some of the younger teachers at Salem Academy.



In 1940, having decided that his "interest in things literary was greater than in things legal," he closed his office and went to Columbia University for graduate study in English and comparative literature. He received a Master of Arts degree in 1941 and continued his studies for another year.

He was assistant professor of English at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, for two years and then returned to North Carolina. For several years, he was assistant director of the Institute of Government in Chapel Hill and for two years a member of the editorial staff of the University of North Carolina Press. While he was in Chapel Hill he had the opportunity of participating in his favorite recreation—acting. He remembers with great pleasure his appearances with the Playmakers.

In 1952, John Fries came home to Winston-Salem, and has been living, ever since, in the house in which he was born. Residence in Winston-Salem has given him an opportunity to participate in the activities in which he is most interested. He has served as elder of the Home Moravian Church, as delegate to Moravian provincial synods, trustee of Salem Academy and College and president of the Wachovia Historical Society. He has also been vice president of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association and chairman of the North Carolina Writers Conference.

His interest in the theater has never wavered. He has been behind the footlights less frequently in recent years, but friends still recall his appearance in a variety of roles, ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous. He is remembered for the dignity of Creon in the *Antigone* of Sophocles and equally well for the moment in *Ladies of the Jury*, when he "brought down the house" by dashing on to the stage, attired in undershirt and shorts, with his face covered with shaving cream, brandishing a brush.



During his first year back in Winston-Salem, John Fries was assistant professor of English at Salem College. In 1954, he organized the John F. Blair Publishing Company. Among the histories, biographies, scholarly books, records, books of short stories, and books of verse he has published, many have been about North Carolina and many have been by North Carolina writers.

Books he has published have won the Mayflower Cup, the Roanoke-Chowan Award (three times), the American Association of University Women Award for children's books (twice), the Thomas Wolfe Award, and the Oscar Arnold Young Memorial Award. He has also had five winners in the Southern Books Competition, based on design and production.

Expressions of appreciation for John Fries's work have not been lacking:

In 1975, the North Carolina Writers Conference gave him a citation for help to North Carolina writers during his twenty years of publishing.

In 1978, at the annual meeting of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, he received the Christopher Crittenden Memorial Award for "significant contribution to the preservation of North Carolina history."

On May 18, 1981, Wake Forest University bestowed on him the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters.

On April 25, 1982, Reynolda House, Inc., hosted a special recognition of John Fries Blair with a literary panel and tributes from friends and authors of the publisher.

The presence of this assemblage tonight is all the tribute which anyone could wish, but I want to add one more expression of appreciation—my own.

John Fries, you have been my confidant and adviser, and, for the last twenty years, my loyal companion and escort.

I am not one bit disappointed in you!





MR. DAVIS:

Born of a distinguished family, nurtured in the shadow of the old F and H Fries Mill, the younger brother of two older and loving sisters, and a man of rare determination and vision, it is significant that our honored guest has risen to such eminence in spite of these handicaps.

Previous speakers have recounted the achievements of John Fries Blair and have reflected upon his goodness and greatness. Now, may I add my own word of praise from the vantage point of one several years his junior who, as a fellow Moravian, has long been privileged to bask in his reflected glory.

In this modern day, in which so many of necessity are caught up in the complex web of corporate or institutional life, it is increasingly rare to find one, as in the case of John Fries, who has managed to chart an independent course, all the while shaping his own destiny to satisfy his boyhood dreams. But his has not been the life of a casual journeyman. Although his many talents, his rare intellect, and diligent pursuit of learning have somehow permitted him the luxury of playing many roles, each in its own way has seemingly prepared him for the next.

So, whether scholar, lawyer, teacher, editor, critic, actor, and now a distinguished publisher, success has attended John Fries at each step along the way, leaving in its wake a host of admiring friends and a grateful public, for the reason that professional excellence and an insatiable desire to serve have long been the driving forces in the life of our honored friend—not the search for material gain. This man of many talents has used them well and for the benefit of many. His goodness is exceeded only by his modesty, and in honoring him we honor ourselves.

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the North Caroliniana Society, I am privileged to present this official citation to our distinguished friend. Will the real, the inimitable John Fries Blair please rise?

[President Davis then presented the certificate bearing the following citation]:

*The North Caroliniana Society,
in recognition of his public service and
of his promotion, enhancement, production, and
preservation of the literature of his native state,
presents its
North Caroliniana Society Award
to
John Fries Blair
May 20, 1983*



JOHN FRIES BLAIR:

There have been many kind things said about me here tonight. As Washington Irving once wrote, "What is it to us whether these stories are true or false, so long as we can persuade ourselves into the belief of them, and enjoy all the charm of the reality?"

And yet I think, somehow, tonight ought also to be a moment of truth, so if you will permit me to be very personal, I should like to tell you a bit about how it really was with me as a child.

When my father attempted to teach me to read, I had no particular difficulty learning the sounds of the letters (he was using a completely phonetic method), but I have a fairly orderly mind (not desk, as some of you can testify), and a Germanic background on my mother's side, so I thought the only seemly way to approach a book was to start, always, at the beginning. Since a child's attention span is short, we didn't get far the first night. As I grew older and my attention span increased, we could get farther into the book, but we never got to the end of it, so I never, fully, learned to read.

Then there was the question of writing. When I was in the first grade, Miss Emma Smith sat down before each of us a copy book in which letters, words, and sentences were written in beautiful Spencerian script at the top of the page, and we were supposed to copy them exactly on the numerous lines below. I tried, and my letters had a certain artistic flourish,

and even some resemblance to the originals. But then a tragedy happened. When the towns of Winston and Salem were combined and we had a public school right in the heart of Salem, they tried to teach me the Palmer method, in which the whole arm, rather than just the fingers, was used in forming letters. Since I was never particularly athletically inclined, I could never master the arm movement, but my beautiful Spencerian script was shattered. Taking notes in law school completed the destruction, so that now my handwriting is legible only by me, and even I can't make out some of the words sometimes.

And then there was mathematics. I got along fairly well until I got to plane geometry. Then I was able to master the irrefutable proof of the proposition that all triangles are isosceles, but since that was palpably untrue, I lost all faith in mathematical reasoning and dropped the subject as soon as possible.

Thus, without reading, writing, or mathematics, I emerged from my early education a functional illiterate.

Thus equipped, I tried various professions: practicing law, teaching, doing research for the Institute of Government, and editing manuscripts at the University Press where my crowning achievement was that monumtental volume, the university catalogue.

I am thankful for all these experiences, but, like Faust, I could never say to any of them, *Verweile doch, du bist so schön*.

In publishing the situation was just as bad. I flitted from muse to muse, from Clio to Melpomene to Euterpe, and from discipline to discipline until along came a manuscript about learning-disabled children, and I was soon able to convince myself that I was not only functionally illiterate but also learning-disabled.

I am deeply indebted to all my authors, but because of the diversity of their gifts and my distractibility, I have gotten to the point that I sometimes wonder if I know anything about anything.

And now the honor has been bestowed upon me. As George Herbert said:

Who would have thought my shriveled heart
Could have recovered greenness? It had gone
Quite underground, as flowers depart
—when they have blown.

And now, as I enter the company of Paul Green, who has gone before, Albert Coates, my former boss, Senator Ervin, Sam Ragan, and Dr.

Gertrude Carraway, I feel that I can say of this moment, as Faust could not say without damnation: *Verweile doch, du bist so schön*. Linger then, you are so beautiful.

Mr. President and members of the North Caroliniana Society: I am completely unworthy of this honor, but I thank you from the bottom of my heart.



DR. JONES:

John, we were cautioned that if we gave you a silver cup, you might rush out and melt it down. So our award is simply a printed certificate. We assure you, however, that the cheapness of our tangible gift is in inverse proportion to the degree of our recognition and appreciation of your enrichment of our lives through your distinguished career.

As we thank you for allowing us to spend this evening with you, we share with you several additional messages.

Harriet Doar, the veteran book review editor from Charlotte, says, "He's done a lot for area writing while holding a high standard." Alan Brilliant says that John Fries Blair "is much admired here at Unicorn." Charleen Swansea of Red Clay Books writes, "I am delighted that the North Caroliniana Society will be honoring you on May 20. Your contributions to literature and culture in our state have been significant. Your kindness and help to me when I was a young publisher gave me both courage and direction. Thank you, John. I wish that I could be with you on the occasion of this celebration. I send you my love."

And Nell Wise Wechter, writes, "I want to say that Mr. Blair justly deserves this honor. I'm proud to be one of his earliest authors and one who was awarded the AAUW prize in 1957. Mr. Blair is a perfectionist, and he 'taught' his authors to be careful and gave them wonderful advice. I owe him all that I am, as an author. . . . I thank him. . . . I'll be there in spirit."

And, finally:

I wanted to personally respond to the gracious invitation you sent me to share an evening with John Fries Blair when he accepts

the North Caroliniana Society Award on May 20. I can't think of anyone more deserving of this prestigious honor.

I would appreciate your expressing to Mr. Blair how proud I am of his contributions to our State's culture and my sincere regrets that I will be unable to attend. The demands on my time from the General Assembly, the Chairmanship of the Education Commission of the States, and my role in the National Governors' Association create a very hectic schedule, particularly during the next two to three months.

Again, thank you so much for wanting me to share this exciting evening with you.

My warmest personal regards.

Sincerely,
Jim [Hunt]

Thank you all for sharing this evening with our mutual friend, John Fries Blair. Good night.



The North Caroliniana Society,
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JOHN FRIES BLAIR
May 20, 1983

Archie K. Davis
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President

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H. G. Jones
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John F. Blair, Publisher

by Roy Thompson

[Reprinted with permission of author from *Winston-Salem Journal*,
May 22, 1983]

Knitting his fingers behind his head and staring at the ceiling as is his way, John Fries Blair said thoughtfully, "I have a suspicion that writing is the most important thing in the world."

Blair is a 79-year-old bachelor whose lifelong passion has been for the English language and its most graceful uses.

During his early working life he tried his hand at many things. He was a scholar, a lawyer, a teacher, a writer, an editor, an actor. . . .

All, it should be noted, are fields of endeavor in which words play an important role.

Blair answered each calling and then decided that it had been a wrong number.

At 50. . . an age at which many men are daydreaming about the pleasures of retirement. . . he ignored the well-meant advice of a number of friends and set a new course for a career as "John F. Blair, Publisher."

In his 29 years as publisher, Blair has added 118 books to the world's shelves. . . many of them by North Carolinians on subjects of regional interest that might never otherwise have been published.

Friday night in Chapel Hill the North Caroliniana Society announced that because of his "unusually distinctive service to the state over a period of years" in supporting and preserving "the historical, literary and cultural heritage of North Carolina" the society was giving its annual North Caroliniana Award to John Fries Blair.

The award came at a good time for Blair, because he is giving serious thought to retiring.

His face is a character actor's face. A splendid face. Deeply lined. Edgar A. Guest would have said that it took a heap of livin' to fashion such a face.

Observant people who have noted the noble handsomeness of an aging bloodhound's thoughtful face might see a similarity.

Sharp, alert eyes. A gambler's eyes. He sees more than most people do...even with cataracts.

He dresses in the slightly rumpled, conservative style of a man who doesn't even know how wide ties and lapels are supposed to be this year...let alone care.

He has the look of a man who never forgets to celebrate the birthday of the inventor of overstuffed chairs.

Ask him about exercise and he recalls the tennis, hunting, fishing and gardening of his youth...even the time he played on the softball team of the junior bar association here.

Now?

"I have become increasingly sedentary with age," he said with a smile of vast contentment.

Ask him almost any question beyond name, rank and serial number, and you will have the experience of watching an answer in the making long before he has brought that answer to the degree of perfection that he requires of his answers before sharing them with outsiders.

He is not using the politician's delay tactics to avoid the question or to tailor it to what he thinks the public would like best to hear.

Blair is a methodical man who wants his answers to be both accurate and well-stated.

Blair the Witness refers the question to the Blair who once did research for the Institute of Government in Chapel Hill, and that Blair searches the vast mental archives of Blair the Scholar before submitting the facts to Blair the Writer...who carefully fashions the reply before submitting it to Blair the Editor...who polishes the reply before relaying it to Blair the Publisher...who cautiously passes it on to let Blair the Lawyer go over it for possible legal problems.

Blair's roots must be close to bedrock in Salem. His Fries ancestors came about 160 years ago, and the Voglers were here before the Revolutionary War.

His father, William A. Blair, was a Quaker (later Moravian) who came here from south of High Point to be principal of old West End School. Then he was superintendent of schools for a time before, as Blair said, "some of the business people lured him away from the schools because they wanted to set up a new bank and needed an executive for it." He became president of People's National Bank.

His mother was Mary Fries, a daughter of John W. Fries, "who was one of the three sons of Francis Fries, the manufacturer."

Dr. Adelaide Fries, another daughter, was the author and translator of Moravian records.

Mary Fries, Blair's mother, was an artist. When she was in Rome with her parents once, a woman saw her work and wanted to teach her the art of portrait painting, but the nearest she ever came to that was to do charcoal portraits of the presidents of Salem College.

The portraits now hang in the Inspector's House at the college.

Grandfather Fries owned the block bounded by Brookstown Avenue and South Cherry, South Marshall and High streets.

"People bought blocks in those days, not lots," Fries said.

His grandfather's sister owned the block to the east; a brother, the block to the west; and nephews, the blocks to the northeast and northwest.

Grandfather Fries had a tennis court, and Blair's parents "did a lot of courting there," Blair said.

When they were married, his grandfather gave his mother the north end of his block, and the Blair home was built in 1901 during the Teddy Roosevelt administration.

He was born there in the house he now lives in, and his sister, Mrs. Robert McCuiston, lives next door in their grandfather's home.

Blair got an early start as a scholar when he and two other grade-school friends were tutored in Latin and learned enough to "make us feel at home in it when we got to Latin in high school."

Before he had finished school, he'd had a great deal of Latin, some German, Greek, French and a bit of Czech.

He got his bachelor of arts degree at Haverford College in 1924 and his law degree from Harvard University in 1928. . . an excellent year for a young lawyer to come home and open a legal practice.

The next year was a different story. Blair said, "Then the Great Depression set in, and the law was pretty poor pickings." He handled civil cases mostly. He did a lot of title work.

He didn't make much money, and he didn't have much fun, but he kept his nose to the grindstone of law for 12 years before deciding, as he said, that "the law wasn't where my heart lay."

He decided to go to Columbia University for a master's degree in English. Ironically, his "best-paying case came in" after his decision was made. It didn't change his mind, but he did stick around long enough to handle the case and collect his fee before heading north.

He got the new degree and taught for a time at Moravian College in Pennsylvania before coming home to do research and write for the Institute of Government in Chapel Hill.

Albert Coates, the founder of the institute, says that some of Blair's writing to make North Carolina's laws understandable to laymen ranks with the best the institute ever produced, but Blair decided that the call that brought him to Chapel Hill had been a wrong number.

He moved to the University of North Carolina Press as an editor, and one of his early assignments was to edit the university's catalog.

"It was horrible!" he recalls.

At the UNC Press he got an inside look at the publishing business, and two things about it worried him: The press was publishing little more than scholarly papers, and national publishers didn't often take a chance on regional books.

So some "fine writers of regional books" were finding it very nearly impossible to get their work published.

In the meantime...

Blair, who had always been interested in the theater, became involved with the Carolina Playmakers. He appeared in some of the productions. He wrote a one-act play, "Cornbread," which the Playmakers produced in 1946.

He considered a career in the theater "from time to time" but eventually decided that "this wasn't the direction in which I was called."

Then his father died, and Blair was named executor of the estate... a task that kept him on the road about as many hours as he was spending in Chapel Hill or Winston-Salem.

He eventually gave up the job in Chapel Hill and came home.

He taught English at Salem for a year and then... against the advice of his friends... rented a basement in Old Salem and hung out a new shingle that read: "John F. Blair, Publisher."

Friends had said that New York was the place for a publisher. He might make a go of it in Atlanta. Winston-Salem, no.

Blair, who is known by his full name of "John Fries Blair," reduced his name to "John F. Blair" for business purposes.

People away from here had a hard time pronouncing "Fries," he said.

New York publishers would have advised against opening a new house with the publication of a book of poetry by a long-dead and little-known Moravian author, but Blair began with John Henry Boner's "Whispering Pines," a book first published in New York in 1883.

Blair the Moravian Romantic made the decision to do it; Blair the Conservative Publisher held the press run to 1,000 copies.

He sold them and gave some thought to a second printing before deciding against it.

Just after he decided, an order for "30 or 40" copies came in from South Africa.

Years later, he still wonders why.

Today . . . near the close of his publishing career . . . Blair is still hard at work.

One look at his desk will tell a visitor that it's a working man's desk.

There's a sign taped to one corner:

"A neat desk is a sign of a sick mind."

Somewhere back of the great piles of manuscripts, letters, records and forgotten treasures that cover his desk Blair is concealed.

Around him, behind him, all around the room and filling chairs once intended for the comfort of visitors one finds a masterpiece of the cluttering art.

The telephone is still readily findable. He has it on a stack of old directories lest it be lost forever.

Each year the telephone rises a little higher as a new directory is added, and when his telephone rings Blair has to stand to reach it.

This . . . according to people who remember his former quarters in the old First National Bank Building . . . is neat by comparison with the old place.

Visitors there sometimes went into his office, mistook it for a store-room and backed out hastily.

There is a story about his leaving the old building that must be told in two versions: Blair's and the one given by people with him at the time.

They agree on the problem:

The building was to be imploded on a certain day, and all tenants had to be out.

Blair was building new quarters, and the building was behind schedule, and he didn't want to have to move twice.

He stayed on . . . hoping for a miracle that never came.

His people packed the rest of the things that were to be moved, but nobody dared touch anything in Blair's office.

At 1 o'clock on the day which the building was to be imploded at 3 . . . or others say . . . Blair stood, looked upon his monumental pile of clutter in despair and, saying "I don't know what you're going to do with this," left.

Blair agrees with the basic scenario, but he recalls that he helped.

"I'm sure I did," he said.

According to legend, the papers stored in boxes for the move 10 years ago are . . . for the most part . . . still in their boxes.

As his reputation has spread, the number of manuscripts has greatly increased and Blair, who used to read everything that came in, now finds reading 500 to 600 manuscripts a year "a physical impossibility."

He still reads everything he is to publish, and he reads a lot of manuscripts that he doesn't publish.

He estimates that he is now publishing about one manuscript in every 100 that the postman brings. A lot of people who suspect themselves of being undiscovered geniuses of American literature send their work to him.

"We read a lot of bad stuff," Blair said.

(He has a rule: "I try not to say anything to the author when I return a bad manuscript. I don't want to offer any false encouragement for him to try again in the same way.")

He's the last to come to work in the mornings. About 11 as a rule.

But he usually keeps on working at home until 1 to 2 a.m.

He still enjoys the variety that comes with being a publisher: "One day I'm reading about Hatteras Island, and the next day it's carnivorous plants, and the next day it's something else, and the next day, something ELSE."

The one-in-a-hundred author whose work is accepted for publication by Blair is luckier than he or she usually knows, because Blair's books are novelties in today's publishing business.

Blair has no patience with the notion that things produced today have to be shoddy. He still produces books that are widely recognized for their technical excellence.

He still uses a high-quality paper that will be readable 50 years from now instead of turning yellow or turning to dust as most of today's books are doomed to do.

Most of his books are still set by hand. It costs more, but it produces higher quality.

Many of them are still hand-sewn rather than glued as most books are today.

His writers get more editorial assistance than writers get from most publishers nowadays.

And there is this. . .

Most publishers are very conservative in ordering second printings of their books, but Blair, who went into business in the first place to give regional authors a chance to see their books in print, believes in taking a chance and keeping them in print.

It costs to do the new edition. It costs to store the books until they sell. And he has to pay taxes on the unsold books.

Blair takes quiet pride in the fact that about 100 of the 118 books he has published are still available.

Generally speaking, however, he is uncomfortable in talking about ways in which his books are superior.

There have been awards. Many of them.

But when pressed for comment on the high quality of his books, about all he would say was that Virginia Ingram, his book designer, and Mitzi Shumate, her predecessor, have had a lot to do with it.

Charles E. Whedbee's tales about the Outer Banks have been his biggest sellers.

His most ambitious book, perhaps, was *Carnivorous Plants of the United States and Canada* by Donald E. Schnell. It has been favorably reviewed all over the world and has been called "the definitive book on carnivorous plants."

Blair went out on a limb with it and ordered a first printing of 15,000 copies. . . of which, he said, "We still have quite a few."

But people have ordered it from Australia, Singapore, Japan, England, Finland, and the orders are still coming in.

Blair's pet book is Ben Dixon MacNeill's *The Hatterasman*.

"It was the first book I published that acquired any distinction," he said, "and I've never lost my affection for it."

He has "at least one copy around here somewhere" of each of the 118 books he has published.

His philosophy as a publisher is pretty much the same now as when he got into the business 29 years ago:

"I think it is important to preserve, rather than destroy, regional differences. I think that regional companies can have an effect in helping to preserve the history of a region, something of the speech, something of the tradition and the folklore. . .

"I believe that a publisher should, within certain limitations of taste and political outlook, give the people the opportunity to say what they have to say, if it's worth saying, and then present it in as attractive a form as he knows how.

"A publisher's taste should be fairly catholic and his acceptance of ideas fairly wide. One year, for example, I published a biography of Tom Dixon, who was certainly a racist, and a book about Nat Turner, the slave rebel."

Blair still believes that he was right in coming home and becoming a regional publisher rather than going to New York, where the publishing action has been for so long.

He believes that the publishing business may be starting to move out of New York slowly because of high rents and fear of walking in the streets at night.

He deplores the trend of conglomerates' buying up publishing houses.

"I think there is a love of literature and a sense of rightness in the use of words. . . a sense, maybe, even of the significance of ideas that is not enough the major concern of a company that owns businesses in various fields, but a good many publishing companies have been bought. . . many of them by people who don't know anything about publishing."

Now, at 79 and plagued by cataracts that will soon require surgery, Blair is concerned about his eyes and his "general age and decrepitude."

Blair said, "I hope I have sense enough to know that nobody is indestructible, and I have reached an age of increased destructibility. I think it's sort of foolish for a man as old as I am to carry that much of that kind of responsibility.

"Unless I make arrangements for some kind of succession my authors might not be very well protected in case anything happened to me.

"If I should become incapacitated, and there isn't really anybody who would have the authority to make decisions, and I don't know how to hedge on that sort of thing.

"I have given my executor extraordinary powers to carry on the business if I should pass on."

And then there was this. . .

"I have no time left for writing. Trying to solve another author's problems leaves you exhausted. . . takes your creative energy.

"I have a play that has been partly written for years (nearly 40 years) that I should very much like to complete."

Blair didn't want to talk much about his play.

"It's historical," he said, "It's about an important and somewhat neglected incident in history, and it expresses certain attitudes of mine."

Writing.

That's the thing!



—Photo by Cookie Snyder



NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY, INC.

North Carolina Collection

UNC Library 024-A

Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514

Chartered on September 11, 1975, as a private nonprofit corporation under provisions of Chapter 55A of the *General Statutes of North Carolina*, the North Caroliniana Society has as its main purpose the promotion of increased knowledge and appreciation of North Carolina heritage through studies, publications, meetings, seminars, and other programs, especially through assistance to the North Carolina Collection of The University of North Carolina Library in the acquisition, preservation, care, use, and display of, and the promotion of interest in, historical and literary materials relating to North Carolina and North Carolinians. The Society, a tax-exempt organization under provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, depends upon the contributions, bequests, and devises of its members and friends.

Unofficially limited to one hundred North Carolinians who have contributed significantly to the state, the Society elects additional individuals meeting its criterion of "adjudged performance," thus bringing together men and women who have shown their respect for and commitment to our state's unique historical, literary, and cultural inheritance.

A highlight of the Society's year is the presentation of the North Caroliniana Society Award to an individual adjudged to have given unusually distinguished service over a period of years to the encouragement, promotion, enhancement, production, and preservation of North Caroliniana.

The North Carolina Collection, the headquarters for the North Caroliniana Society, has been called the "Conscience of North Carolina," for it seeks to preserve for present and future generations all that has been or is published about the state and its localities and people or by North Carolinians, regardless of subject. In this mission the Collection's clientele is broader than the University community; indeed, it is the entire citizenry of North Carolina as well as those outside the state whose research extends to North Carolina or North Carolinians. Its acquisitions are made possible by gifts and private endowment funds; thus, it also represents the respect that North Carolinians have for their heritage. Members of the North Caroliniana Society have a very special relationship to this unique institution which traces its beginnings back to 1844 and which is unchallenged as the outstanding collection of printed North Caroliniana in existence. A leaflet, "North Carolina's Literary Heritage," is available without charge from the Collection.

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